



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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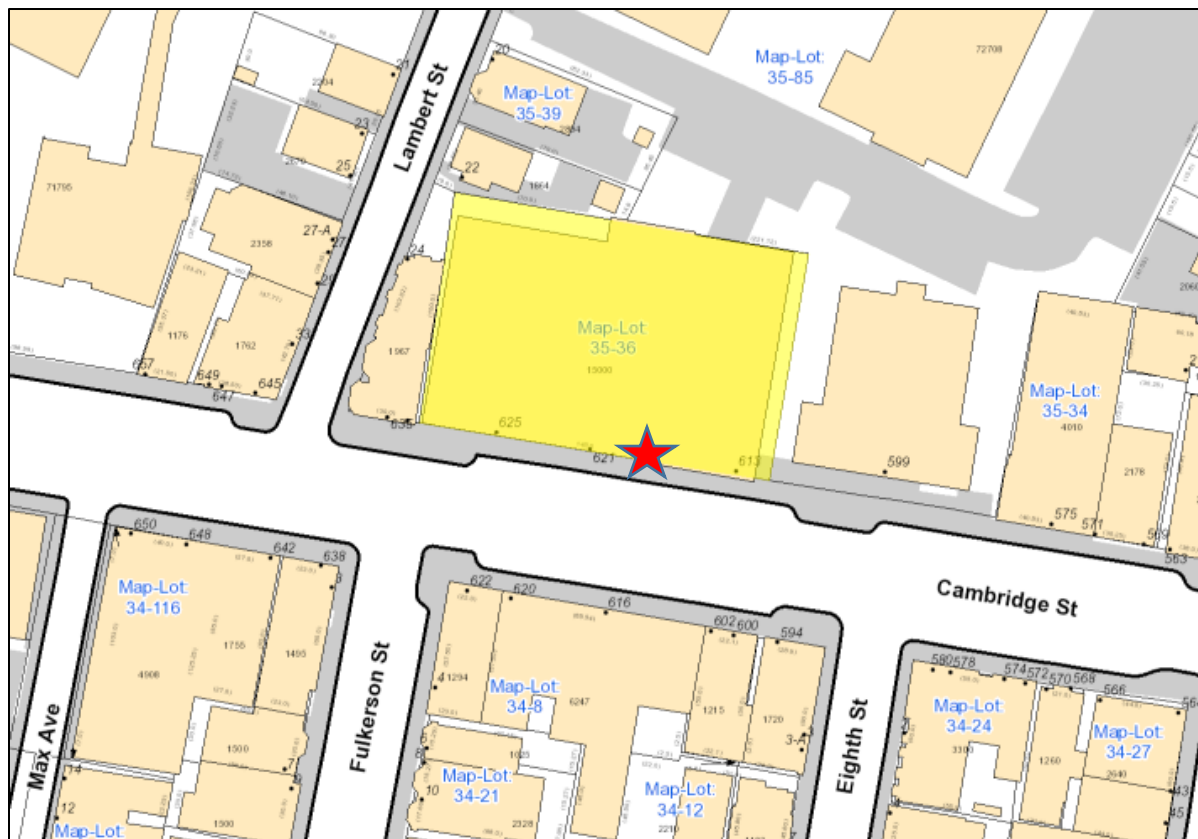


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Date: October 1, 2021
To: Cambridge Historical Commission
From: Sarah Burks
Re: “Live Poultry Fresh Killed” Sign, Evaluation for Landmark Designation Study

Background

On August 24, 2021, the Commission received a petition requesting the initiation of a landmark designation study of the “Live Poultry Fresh Killed” sign, which was formerly located at the Mayflower Poultry store at 621 Cambridge Street. The petition contains fifty-one signatures. The Election Commission verified the petition had the signatures of at least ten Cambridge registered voters, thus validating the petition for consideration by the Commission. The staff placed the matter under “New Business” on the September 2, 2021 agenda of the Commission and the Commission voted to schedule a public hearing on the matter for its October 7 meeting.



Star indicating the approximate former location of the sign.

The business, Mayflower Poultry, auctioned off the sign to the highest bidder on August 26, 2021. The winning bid came from the East Cambridge Business Association, who now owns the sign and the trademark rights to the graphic image. The poultry business relocated to 139 Newmarket Square in Boston and will shift its business to be mostly wholesale sales with less emphasis on the retail side. (“Where the ‘Live Poultry Fresh Killed’ sign will go becomes the question after ECBA’s winning bid,” by Marc Levy for *CambridgeDay* September 6, 2021). As required by a condition of the sale, the sign was removed within a few days of the sale and is now in the custody of the East Cambridge Business Association, which is evaluating possible new locations on Cambridge Street for the sign.

An application by Riverside Properties to restore the car barn at 613, demolish the retail store at 621 and replace it with a new one-story building, and to renovate the retail building at 625-629 was received on July 13, 2021 for a hearing on August 5. The applicant later requested that the hearing be postponed for one month to allow for design revisions after having presented the project to the East Cambridge Planning Team. At its September 2, 2021 hearing the Historical Commission voted to approve the project as presented, subject to staff review of masonry restoration details at the car barn, a National Register-listed building. The applicant plans for the three attached buildings to be used for offices, though the building use was not subject to Historical Commission review or regulation. The interim protections of the East Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Study expired on September



613-629 Cambridge St., 2018. Sign is to the right of Mayflower Poultry retail shop. Camb. Assessing Dept. photo

Mayflower Poultry Company

Somerville Live Poultry, Inc. uses the trade name Mayflower Poultry and has been in operation since 1932. James Gould bought the business from Richard C. Silver in 1996. By 2011 the retail demand for live poultry, fresh killed had dwindled and Gould stopped selling live poultry from the store but retained the beloved sign. The Silver family owned the property at 613-629 Cambridge Street until April 30, 2021 when they sold it to Riverside Properties, the current owner.

Somerville Live Poultry had a projecting sign with that name in the early days of the business as seen in this c. 1940 photograph donated to the Commission by Anthony Galluccio. A chicken is pictured in the middle of the sign with the words Somerville (top) and Live Poultry (below).



The existing sign frame was installed in 1966 and can be seen in a 1970 CHC survey photograph. The plastic sign faces have been replaced at least once over the years. The wording “Live Poultry *Fresh Killed,*” is present in this 1970 view of the sign. The chicken silhouette was added at some point later.



Landmark Criteria and Goals

Landmarks are enacted by the City Council upon recommendation of the Historical Commission. The Commission commences a landmark designation study process by its own initiative or by voting to accept a petition of ten registered voters.

The criteria provided in the ordinance outlines eligible properties as:

any property within the city being or containing a place, structure, feature, or object which it determines to be either (1) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the City or the Commonwealth or (2) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures... (2.78.180.A)

The purpose of landmark designation is described in the ordinance, which was enacted to,

preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the City and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation and maintenance of neighborhoods, sites and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose; to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such neighborhoods, areas, or structures; and by furthering these purposes to promote the public welfare by making the city a more desirable place in which to live and work. (2.78.140)

There is only one sign in Cambridge that has undergone a landmark study and been designated by the City Council and that is the Shell Spectacular Sign at 187 Magazine Street (corner of Memorial Drive). The Shell sign is a free-standing structure and separately owned from the automotive repair shop and gas station. The situation with the “Live Poultry Fresh Killed” sign is very different in that it was not a free-standing sign but attached to the building at 621 Cambridge Street. The business owner that erected the sign, Richard C. Silver, had sold both the business and the property to different owners. James Gould, current owner of Mayflower Poultry, trademarked the sign’s graphic image in 2005, realizing that it had gained great popularity and had the potential for use on saleable goods such as t-shirts, posters, and the like. He opted to sell the sign when the decision to relocate the business was made. Indeed, the value of the sign due to its popularity and iconic status as an informal East Cambridge landmark translated into a sale price of \$14,500 at auction, with the trademark rights selling for an additional \$8,000. Unlike painted wall signs that sometimes remain and fade over time with a building, attached signs tend to be ephemeral and come and go as the property of the tenants in leased commercial spaces. When the frame for an attached sign remains in place, it is almost always re-faced with a sign graphic and content related to the next commercial tenant. In this case, the building itself is to be demolished and replaced with new infill construction.

Relationship to Criteria

The Blake & Knowles Foundry meets criterion (1) for its associations with the economic and social history of Cambridge. It also meets criterion (2) as being architecturally significant in the context of adjoining Blake & Knowles buildings that are already listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Staff Recommendations

For the reasons stated, the staff believes that the property at 101 Rogers Street is eligible for landmark designation. The Foundry Building is a very significant building in the industrial and

social history of the city; demolition or destructive alterations should not be contemplated. However, the development process has become extremely controversial. It is unclear whether the building is actually threatened, and whether landmarking is warranted at this time.

The Commission should consider whether initiating a designation study would be effective in accomplishing the long-term preservation of the building.

cc: Jason Alves, ECBA
John Whisnant, lead petitioner
Sarah Rhatigan, Esq., attorney for Riverside Properties